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THE FEDERAL MEAT AND POULTRY INSPECTION PROGRAM

A Matter of Wholesomeness

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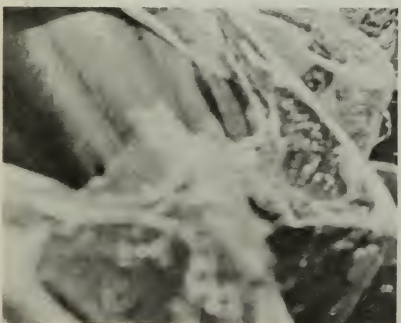
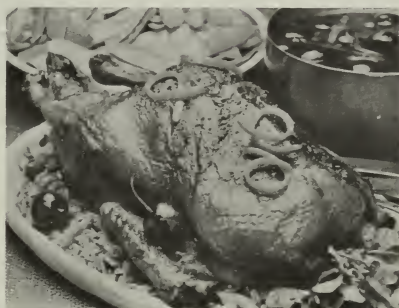
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Millions of livestock and poultry are slaughtered each year to satisfy the Nation's demand for protein-rich, nutritious meat and poultry products. In the production of such huge volumes of food—billions of pounds yearly—how are unwholesome or contaminated meat and poultry products screened from the wholesome and good?

This complex task is the responsibility of the Animal and Plant

Health Inspection Service with about 9,000 inspectors and veterinarians assigned to some 6,800 meat and poultry slaughtering and processing plants throughout the country. To describe in detail how the inspection process works would require many pages. But it boils down to continuous inspection, required by law, of the slaughtering and processing of livestock and poultry until the wholesome products are passed as food.



Authority for this consumer protection is provided by the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act. Since the first Meat Inspection Act was passed in 1907, Congress has refined and strengthened this authority to protect the public from unwholesome meat and poultry products. How these Acts are being enforced is briefly described here.

Wholesomeness Begins with Healthy Animals

When livestock and poultry are offered for slaughter, a careful inspection is made of the live animals and birds for signs of disease. Any animal or bird appearing sick or diseased is tagged for special examination during slaughter. No dead or dying animal is allowed in the slaughtering plant.

Inspecting Carcasses

As the animal or bird is dressed and cleaned, the carcass and internal organs are examined for disease, contamination, or other signs that show an experienced inspector, under the supervision of a veterinarian, whether the entire carcass or any part is unfit for human food. Here again, those that are unacceptable are removed. Only when the carcass and edible internal organs have passed those rigid inspections are they released for marketing.

Inspecting Processed Products

Meat and poultry inspected during slaughter may be processed further into hams, sausages, frozen dinners, soups and similar products. Because the inspected meat and poultry may become spoiled or contaminated during shipment and storage, it is inspected again for wholesomeness and then con-

tinuously during processing into the finished product.

The manufacturer of these processed meat and poultry products must use cooking, cooling, and mixing methods approved by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. He must obtain approval for the recipe of his product and for the label he applies to the container. The inspector uses these approved methods, recipes, and labels as yardsticks to measure whether the processing is done in a way to produce a safe and truthfully labeled product. If the product does not measure up, it is not released for marketing.

Clean Plants

Slaughtering and processing plants must be clean and properly equipped in order to produce clean and wholesome products. Methods used during slaughter and further processing affect the wholesomeness of the finished product. So slaughtering plants and food processors must follow rules of sanitation approved by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

To begin with, facilities and equipment in plants must be easy to clean and easy to keep that way. For example, equipment must be easy to dismantle for thorough cleaning—like a coffee percolator whose insides can be completely removed. Surfaces of equipment coming in contact with food must be smooth—like a kitchen counter—so they can be cleaned quickly.

The floor plan, water supply, waste disposal methods, and lighting must be approved for each plant facility. Plant layout guidelines are available from the



Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to aid in constructing plants where daily routines can be performed efficiently and under sanitary conditions. For example, all corners in the plant floor should be rounded so that they can be cleaned thoroughly in the least amount of time.

The inspector checks the plant before operations begin each day and continues this inspection throughout the day to see that sanitary conditions are maintained. If the equipment is not properly cleaned or an unsanitary situation in the plant is discovered, slaughtering or processing operations may be stopped until corrective steps have been taken.

Scientific and Technical Support

The inspector is supported by many technical "tools" in his in-

spection for uniform wholesomeness and truthful labeling. For example, standards of composition and identity for products tell the inspector—and the manufacturer—what kinds of meat or other ingredients are allowed in certain products, and how much fat or which seasonings and chemicals are permitted. Specialists check to see that the product is properly represented by the label.

Scientific laboratories provide information that guides the plant inspector in the field. Samples the inspector submits are analyzed to evaluate sanitation and freshness and to determine the presence of food poisoning bacteria or toxins and harmful chemical or drug residues. Tests are run to identify kinds of meat in a product to determine that only those meats approved for the product—and no



others—are used. Scientists cooperate with State, local, and other Federal agencies in investigating cases of alleged meat-borne illness.

The need for more scientific support for the inspector has grown during recent years. Consumers are using more convenience foods and asking for more detailed labeling. At the same time, industry is introducing new ingredients for foods and using new equipment in processing foods.

To meet the need for protecting the consumer, new Federal laboratories have been constructed—each equipped to provide complete chemical, microbiological, and pathological analyses on samples submitted for testing. In

addition, selected commercial laboratories have been authorized by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to test biological and chemical residue samples to help expedite control of residue problems.

Imported Products

The Federal Meat and Poultry Inspection Program provides for the wholesomeness of imported products, too. Products imported from foreign countries must meet the same tests for wholesomeness as products produced in the United States.

■ The operations of foreign inspection systems and plants are periodically reviewed by Animal and Plant Health Inspection Ser-



vice veterinarians to make sure they meet U.S. requirements.

■ Inspectors in the plants assure day-to-day compliance with inspection regulations.

■ Products are required to meet the same standards of composition.

■ Labels are checked for the same details of accuracy.

■ Samples are routinely examined at Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service laboratories.

All imported meat and poultry products are inspected at the dock

or at inland inspection points before they are allowed to be distributed in this country. A shipment must be accompanied by a meat inspection certificate of approval issued by the responsible official of the exporting country.

That Extra Step—

Because there is always the possibility of human error, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Ser-

Marks of Wholesomeness

This official USDA mark for approved meat carcasses is stamped only on major cuts of the carcass, so it may not always be visible on consumer cuts like roasts or steaks:



This mark is on all prepackaged processed meat products—from beef barley soup to frankfurters—that have been federally inspected:



This mark is used on federally inspected fresh and frozen poultry and processed poultry products. Although visible on all consumer-packaged frozen and processed products, the mark may not always appear on fresh poultry which has been bulk shipped and then packaged at the retail level:



In States operating their own meat or poultry inspection programs, the State inspection stamp may be the only mark on the product. However, State-inspected products and federally inspected products are required to come up to the same standards. Meat and poultry inspected under a State system, however, can be sold only within that State. Any carcass or its processed products going across State lines or into other countries must be federally inspected.

vice adds one more step to protect the wholesomeness of meat and poultry products. Investigations are made into the business operations of persons and firms that transport, store, handle, and distribute meat and poultry products.

At these points, checks are made for meat or poultry which may have entered food marketing channels without being properly labeled or without being inspected; products bearing counterfeit inspection stamps; and products which may have become contaminated or spoiled in storage or during shipment.

Any such products are controlled by detention, recall, seizure, or similar actions so that they do not reach the consumer's table.

Corrective steps are taken or products are properly disposed of in the presence of an Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service official. Usually the owner voluntarily recalls "suspect" products to protect the reputation of his company.

Additional Regulatory Protection—

The Federal Meat and Poultry Inspection Program provides protection through slaughtering, processing, and interstate marketing. Other agencies, such as the local health authority and the Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, help provide regulatory protection during further distribution.

What the Federal Meat and Poultry Inspection Program did during 1975:

- Inspected over 3 billion birds,
over 113 million meat animals, and
over 69 billion pounds of processed products,
- Condemned over 37 million birds,
over 390 thousand meat animals, and
over 60 million pounds of processed products.
- Reviewed over 127.6 thousand product labels and rejected almost 8.8 thousand labels.
- Tested some 19.6 thousand samples for residues.
- Ran almost 87.5 thousand tests for bacteria, species of meat, antibiotics, etc.
- Passed for U.S. entry over 1.7 billion pounds of foreign products and rejected about 12.5 million pounds.
- Detained over 11.3 million pounds of "suspect" meat and poultry in 931 detention actions.

This publication supersedes "Meat and Poultry—Wholesome for You," Home and Garden Bulletin No. 170, October 1969; "Meat and Poultry—Standards for You," Home and Garden Bulletin No. 171, October 1969; "Foreign Meat and Poultry Inspection Program," MPI-3, August 1973; "Meat and Poultry Inspection, A Capsule Summary," MPI-4, September 1973; and "Meat and Poultry Inspection, Compliance and Review Activities," Unnumbered, April 1972.